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THE AUTHORITARIAN TEMPTATION. TURNING A MODERN TYRANT INTO A POLITICAL ROLE MODEL IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

MIHAI CHIOVEANU

Abstract

A survey of post-1989 Romania is to indicate that while looking forward and striving for democratic achievements, the country also had to look backward and "come to terms" with her non-democratic recent past. Unfortunately, for more than 15 years after the collapse of communism no firm resolution has been brought to any of these pasts. The present paper is an overview of the politics of memory and its impact on the process of democratization in the case of Romania from 1989 to 2004. In this sense it focuses mainly, but not exclusively, on the way Romanian society dealt with history, memory, and amnesia when it came to Ion Antonescu and the Romanian Holocaust.

Keywords: post-communism, Ion Antonescu, memory, Holocaust, democratization.

A survey of post-1989 Romania may reveal that while looking forward and striving for democratic achievements, the country also had to look backward and "come to terms" with her non-democratic recent past. In these respect, the fascist years epitomized by the Iron Guard, the Antonescu war-period, and the communist epoch, are the three more important episodes. However, one might add here the national-communist, distinct, Ceauşescu period, nevertheless the last decade with its suspicious, stage-managed, bloody revolution, and violent miners' marches to Bucharest.

Unfortunately, for more than 15 years after the collapse of communism no firm resolution has been brought to any of these pasts. A lack of political and prosecutorial will, together with a visible shortage of funds, and backed by an increasingly acute dispute among "memorians," historians, and politicians representing different camps, only managed to urge things to a deadlock.

Romania is not a singular case from this perspective, though many Romanians leave with this impression and frustrations generating complex. It is not even different. It is the same, only worst. Others in the East, where, as Leszek Kolakowski suggested, the *Historikerstreit* just began, and sometimes even in the West, have similar problems when it comes to critically scrutinize

their "unusable past" and memory. What might suggest a Romanian "exceptionalism" on this particular matter is the incapacity to initiate a serious and inevitable debate over regrettable performances. Most woeful, this prolonged situation prevented the society discovering what might be worth recovering from the past, and used in the present, and future.

Immediately after 1989, East Europeans politicians and journalists often translated totalitarianism restrictively in terms of communism and limited their studies and practice of remembrance to the latest. Often, they simply preferred to ignore the other "face of Janus."[1] What really mattered for the Easterners was how to operate with the recent past as to present themselves as victims of the Soviet and communist oppression, a tyranny to whom they opposed, and resisted, as democrats or at least as anti-communists. Confident in the credibility of this "culture of victimization" they did not imagine that several episodes, symbols, and charismatic figures from the pre-communist past might thwart the newly proposed historical narrative, and hinder the crafting of a new national identity. The absence for several decades of any rigorous practices of remembering and democratic evaluation of the pre-war and war period made them hardly realize the "nightmare memory" of what they regarded as the "Golden Age" of their history.

For the Romanians, as well as for all Easterners, 1989 was supposed to represent what 1945 represented for the Westerners, the "zero year".[2] Many believed that once the moral and legal problems of communism will be solved, and several syndromes of that period erased, the society, purged of sins, and with its national pride retrieved, will be able to look forward. Others thought that it would be even better if people would completely disregard the Past and look exclusively in the future.[3] Lastly, some stressed the necessity of a return to 1945, perceived in the East as the "zero year" in the Soviet, unsatisfactory variant, and suggested that the politics of retribution orchestrated by Moscow and the local communists after the war have to be reconsidered.[4] Though for different reasons and from different perspectives, they underlined the fact that

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[1] See A. James Gregor, *The Two Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century*, Yale, Yale University Press, 2000.

[2] Istvan Deak, "Introduction," in Istvan Deak, Jan Gross, Tony Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War Two and its Aftermath*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 5-7.

[3] Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy: Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 144. For politicians, oblivion is more advantageous than remembering. Adrian Năstase, nowadays Romania Prime Minister, stressed the idea in 1995, and so did Mircea Geoană, minister of foreign affairs, in 2001. While referring mainly to the communist period, the two might have had in mind the example of 1980s Spain, the way a weak civil society unprepared to confront trauma opted for consensus in order to avoid polarization and thus, foster democracy.

[4] See Istvan Deak, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

unlike the West, the East, including Romania, bears the burden of several pasts, and have to transgress as many boundaries of memory.

After 1989 the Romanians initiated, the debate over the communist past although barely sketched if compared with the evolution of the same problem in other former socialist countries. Unprepared, psychically and methodologically, and in many cases unwilling to cope with it, they were nonetheless to discover that the *Others* are also interested on a similar debate regarding Romania's pre-communist past. The issue of Holocaust and Romania's participation in it was regarded with suspicion, and generated bitter reactions. In fact, it was the most neuralgic point from this perspective, and the only one that made the real interest of the Westerners, who, in many cases, were also unprepared to leave a well established canon, and accept a larger frame for a comparative discussion on both the Holocaust and the Gulag[5]. Few Romanians accepted it as a crucial test of moral strength, and first step in the participation to European memory.[6] Even fewer expressed their option for an equal treatment of the two forms of totalitarianism and their crimes, and plead for nuances, empathy, and sensibility, at the same time rejecting sophistry and conspiracy grounded mythologies.[7] Many were still trapped in the pre-1989 anti-fascist obsessive paradigm and "Organized Forgetting," and "victims" of its pedagogical historiography and history obsessed pedagogy, which never encouraged studies on fascism, anti-Semitism or the Holocaust.[8] They also did not realized, and could not accept that despite the tremendous impact of the 1989 revolutions, and the collapse of the communist regimes in the East, the West was in the 1980s and 1990s primarily interested in the fiftieth series of commemorations relating Nazism, World War II, and the Holocaust. When they finally realized that a memory slalom is no longer possible, they often came to operate with a particular "hierarchy of urgencies" that frequently led to the trivialization of Holocaust, nonetheless to deflective and selective negationism.[9]

However, the way the intellectual debate over the memory of Nazism and communism evolved in the West, and in the East, is more or less relevant when it comes to analyze the way Eastern societies implemented the "de-communization" process, opened the files of the secret police, and so on. In

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[5] See Martin Malia, "Forward: The Uses of Atrocity," in Stéphane Courtois *et al.*, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. ix-xx.

[6] Dan Pavel, "Banalizarea Răului în Istorie" [The Banality of Evil in History], *Sfera Politicii*, no.60, May, 1998.

[7] Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Sunt fascismul şi comunismul fraţi siamezi?" [Are fascism and communism Siamese brothers?], *Cuvântul*, 5 (253), May, 1998.

[8] See Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în al Doilea Război Mondial (1939-1945)* [Romania in World War II], Bucharest, All, 1999, p. 152.

[9] See Michael Shafir, "Selective Negationism of the Holocaust in East-Central Europe. The Case of Romania", *RFE/RL East European Perspectives*, 4, 25, 18 December, 2002.

many cases it represented nothing but a "Red herring." Those who really wanted to do it were not restrained in their enterprise. On the contrary, the West even encouraged them, at least politically if not intellectually. The others only pleaded and mimed their wish and will to break with the totalitarian communist past, its practices and "habits of the heart." It is therefore no wonder that exactly the post-communist societies in which the triumph of democracy is still uncertain are the ones that still refuse to debate communism beyond the episode of the "Soviet tanks" and "collaborationist ethnic minorities" and that precisely those who could face communism only with difficulty decided to marginalize the pre-communist past, to let his extra-memory wait. Moreover, the same societies much to easily accepted the sudden return to the anti-democratic, and not only anti-communist, symbols of a romanced, re-invented and politically instrumentalized pre-communist past.[10]

It is hard to clame that the Romanian political and intellectual elite is indifferent to the Past. In fact, after 1989, in the East, in no other former communist country the elites turned to the recent past in their search for models and legitimacy. Not only historical figures and cultural personalities but also political leaders and parties were brought back on stage. In this context, a "shortage of memory," also experienced by the West in the case of both Nazism after 1945, and communism, not their memory, after 1989, nonetheless the fact that the "past is not yet another island" in the East, was but to ease the sudden and indiscriminately return to an often-controversial past.

Post-communists Romania experienced a deep fragmentation of memory, which was a direct consequence of the institutional fragmentation and society polarization. If one takes into consideration the previous monopoly of the totalitarian state over history and memory, one might even welcome the process.[11] The problem is that a group – not unique and not necessarily the most representative - of extremely visible and noisy party activists and ethno-vulgata historians, rapidly recycled into extreme anti-communists, managed from the very beginning to draw the attention and support of a significant segment of the population on the basis of an easily digestible, xenophobic, ultra-nationalist pseudo-memory whom in general lines they articulated under Ceauşescu. It would be unfair to say that the democrats made no effort to resist the new ultranationalist canon, demystify history, oppose the traditional-heroic valuation of the past, and any other form of history manipulation.[12] Unfortunately, trapped into the logic of a permanent demystification, they ended up as helpless

[10] Vladimir TismăneanuI, *Fantasies of Salvation*, pp. 13-16.

[11] Alexandru Zub, "Discursul istoric sub impactul schimbărilor" [Change and Historical Discourse], *Sfera Politicii*, 39, June, 1996.

[12] Adrian Cioroianu, "Mit şi Istorie, memorie şi uitare" [Myth and History, Memory and Oblivion], *Sfera Politicii*, 91-92, June, 2001, pp. 20-25.

prisoners of an extremely negative historiosophy.[13] Thus, what they could offer as an alternative was a history based on self-stigma, a Cioran-type perspective on Romania's history that many Romanians neither wanted nor needed.

The year following the collapse of the communist regime, the extremist "Greater Romania Party" the ultra-nationalist "Romanian National Unity Party," and "The Romanian Hearth" organization, aroused from the political and ideological vacuum created by the revolution. Striving for popularity and votes, for a place on the new, widely opened Romanian political stage, those political forces precipitated in an innocent and nonchalant way in salvaging, confiscating, and than instrumentalizing for political reasons exactly the most contested and disputable episodes and figures from Romania's pre-communist history. The absence of any political and ideological restriction, and the media boom, was but to allow this group of cynical activists and members of the defunct *Securitate* (secret police) to be more "imaginative" and mobile. In other words, to exploit and irrigate the deepest fears and frustrations of the moment, and launch violent attacks against "all the enemies of the Romanian nation," while slightly adjusting their previous rhetoric to the new context.[14]

Among many other deeds, this group of political and intellectual charlatans successfully managed from the very beginning to haze the barely initiated discussion about memory and *Vergagenheitsbewältingung*. The manner in which they retrieved in the early 1990s the figure of Marshal Ion Antonescu, exploited his myth, initiated his cult, contested the decision of the 1946 communist law-court who condemned Antonescu for war crimes, and demanded the rehabilitation of the "anti-Soviet war hero," represents only one of the dreadful, nonetheless successful and popular, initiatives of this group.

Several scholars suggested that the problems faced by post-communist Romania have less to do with the interwar period, and more with the legacy of the communist and national-communists epoch. That not so much interwar nationalism but several symbols and key figures, confiscated, distorted, and instrumentalized under Ceauşescu by his sycophants and hagiographers, who invented the tradition of a monolithic ethnocratic state,[15] are still to inflect the mentality of some of the Romanians.[16] Some took the above consideration as a

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[13] Alexandru Zub and Sorin Antohi, *Oglinzi retrovizoare. Istorie, memorie şi morală în România* [Rearvision Mirrors. History, Memory and Morality in Romania], Iaşi, Polirom, 2002, pp. 94-95.

[14] Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Epilogue-Fears, Phobias, Frustrations. Eastern Europe between Ethnocracy and Democracy", in *Reinventing Politics. Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*, New York, The Free Press, 1993.

[15] Ceauşescu's regime, a mixture of nationalism and Stalinism, is often defined as a right wing, even quasi-fascist regime. See Henry E. Carey, "Post-communist Right Radicalism in Romania", in Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg eds., *The Revival of Right Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, London, Frank Cass, 1997, p. 149.

[16] See Lucian Boia, "Riscul izolaționismului" [The Risk of isolationism], *Sfera Politicii*, 39, June, 1996, p. 15.

"kernel of truth." Others did not, and continued to return to the grass roots of the "incalculable visitants" from the past. For them, the communist period represented only a huge refrigerator that made possible the survival of interwar nationalism without affecting it.[17] Lastly, few political scientists took into consideration both the "radical continuity" and the "radical return," the more socially influential national-communist trend and the traditional one, and stressed the sheared elements and features of the two including Antonescu's cult, xenophobia, the denial of Holocaust, and so on.[18]

A symbol of Romania's dictatorial and xenophobic pre-communist past, and a war criminal for the democrats, Antonescu, the central historical figure of a complex and multi-facet nationalist and anti-communist mythology, was exonerated after 1989 by his apologists who, after a leap into "a heroic past" with its violent solutions, wanted to present and propose him as a model for the future, and convince the Romanians to "live under his shadow."

Publicly not that prominent before 1989, at least not before 1975 when the novel "Delirul" (The Delirium) by Marin Preda was published for the first time, rather denounced, and sentenced, as a "fascist dictator" and "traitor" by the official anti-fascist discourse,[19] Antonescu became a popular historical figure in the 1990s. A public opinion pool from May 1995, made by IRSOP, indicates that 62% of the interviewed Romanians continued to express their admiration for the Marshal. Hard to say for what exactly they were to "pray" him at the time, and how they perceived him, as long as, according to the same pool, only 2% of them expressed their admiration for Hitler, and only 13% candidly exhibited their xenophobia. However, what the results of the pool reveals are the side effects of the successful, biased propaganda of the pro-Antonescu camp on one hand, and of the mal-concerted public debate on the Antonescu period on the other hand.

In 1990 it was possible and to a certain degree acceptable to find an excuse, and explain the pro-Antonescu attitude saying that, due to the communist period, the Romanians did not knew much about their past. In 2002 it was still possible, though unacceptable. No matter the attitude and arguments, any attempt to rehabilitate Antonescu and his regime was to indicate, at least, that the xenophobic, anti-Semitic, nationalist, dictatorial and quasi-fascist, eliminationist Past was not annoying *them*.

Hard to say that this "awkward Past" ever represented a firm option for the future for most of the Romanians and that, as a consequence, post-communist Romania, with its "outburst of ethnic nationalism" and "hampered

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[17] Bernard Pacteau, "Congelatorul ideilor false" [The refrigerator of the false ideas], *Revista 22*, 36, 7-13 September, 1994.

[18] See Michael Shafir, "Romanian Extreme Right in the Post-Communist Period", *Sfera Politicii*, March 1994, p. 4.

[19] Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în al Doilea Război Mondial (1939-1945)*, pp. 70-71.

democratization" was to fail "outside History" once more.[20] Unfortunately, from outside Romania, meaning USA, Israel, and Western Europe that was, till recently, the general impression left by the slow, painful evolution of the country from 1989 up to 2004.[21] Often, this impression was if not created than strengthened by Romania's "unwilling politicians" and "undecided intellectuals" who were perceived from outside, and described from within, indiscriminately, as a monolithic group caught up in a common anti-liberal project including, among other things, the recovery and commemoration of Romania's "fascist past." Consequently, Antonescu's apologists and the "champions" of Iron Guard, and outstanding intellectuals who insisted on the urgency of a prioritized in their view critical exam of the communist traumatic past as more representative for the deep moral crisis faced by post-communist Romania were often placed under the same stigmatizing "banner." The fact that some represented the state and its institutions, and the others different forms of agglutination and institutionalization of an emerging civil society, political parties, or marginal groups striving for reinsertion in society contributed to an increased confusion and uphold suspicion towards different approaches of the recent past.

Immediately after 1989 it was by all means for the extremist and ultra-nationalist parties to include on their anti-democratic agenda, along side anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and Holocaust denial, the rehabilitation of Romania's wartime leader, Ion Antonescu. However, not only the extremists were to defend him, and uphold his personality and positive historical role.[22] Sometimes even the moderates remained silent or expressed reluctance when it came to debate past genocide, and tended to minimalise the anti-Semitic policy of Antonescu.[23] Concerned with the international image of the country some reiterated old clichés: "Antonescu was a savior of the monarchy and his country" (Ion Rațiu), "a defender of the Romanian nation and therefore a good Romanian" (Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu).[24] Hard to classify such attitudes and say what exactly makes the difference between the extremists and the rest of Antonescu's defenders.[25] Moreover, what is sad and disturbing is that even after

[20] For a less pessimistic perspective see Dragoş Petrescu, "Can Democracy Work in Southeastern Europe? Ethnic Nationalism *vs.* Democratic Consolidation in Post-Communist Romania," in Bálázs Trencsényi *et. all* eds., *National Building and Contested Identities: Romanian & Hungarian Case Studies*, Budapest, Iaşi, Regio Books, Polirom, 2001.

[21] See Vladimir Tismăneanu, *The Revolutions of 1989, Between past and Future*, London, Routledge Press, 1999, p. 20.

[22] See Michael Shafir, "Marshal Antonescu's Post-Communist Rehabilitation: Cui Bono?", in Randolph L. Brahan ed., *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 364.

[23] See Wiliam Totok, "Discursul Revizionist" [The Revisionist Discourse], *Sfera Politicii*, supplement, 1, September, 1998, pp. 26-27.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

[25] For Michael Shafir the difference consist in the role attributed to Antonescu's figure. The moderates regard the Marshal as a mean. On contrary, for the extremists, he is first of all a

2000 articles published in democratic newspapers continue to defend and justify Antonescu's policy.[26] At the same time, no wonder that in 2001, the results of an electronic pool made by a central daily indicates that only 24,55% of the Romanians who answered the questionnaire consider that Antonescu is a war criminal. [27]

Vladimir Tismăneanu defined the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu in the early 1990s as "a shocking example of historic amorality and lack of political tact."[28] If one looks at the post-communist legitimization process, and the struggle for political space and power between the "successors" of the Romanian Communist Party and the traditional parties, one might understand who desperately needed Antonescu as a historical referent.

In April 1992, during Easter, Mihai I paid, after a long absence, his first visit to Romania. The unexpected positive response of the population frightened the government, as several hundred thousands, of whom many were just curious and others rather anti-communist than monarchists, gathered in Bucharest to welcome him. First of all because the presence of the king weakened the image of president Iliescu and his party, the *National Salvation Front*, as Saviors of the country. Some Romanians were looking for another Savior "The Monarchy saves Romania" was the new slogan of the anti-communist and anti-Iliescu opposition for the next years, and rejected the national consensus proposed by the government.[29] The response of the authorities was bitter, rude, and stupid. The king was forbidden access into Romania for several years. Moreover, Antonescu, the Savior of the 1940s[30] was immediately brought on stage as a counterbalance symbol, and presented as a martyr, betrayed, together with his country, by the collaborationist king, decorated by the Soviets.[31] On a short term this strategy proved successful, anyway more successful than the attempts to reinforce after 1989 the invented republican tradition.[32] Yet, on a long term, it had terrible consequences. It affected the international image of Romania,

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'legitimization model," and a purpose, namely the liquidation of Romania's nascent democracy. See Michael Shafir, "Marshal Antonescu's Post-Communist Rehabilitation: Cui Bono?" p. 364.

[26] Valeriu Graur, "Războiul dezrobirii," [The Liberating War], in *Aldine*, no. 272/2001, supplement of *România liberă*, 30 June 2001.

[27] See the electronic pool „A fost Mareşalul Antonescu un «criminal de război»?" [Was Marshal Antonescu a "War Criminal"?] *Ziua*, 24/25, June 2001.

[28] Vladimir TismăneanuI, *Fantasies of Salvation*, p. 72.

[29] Mihai Chioveanu, "Monarhi şi « Salvatori »" [Kings and "Saviors"]. *Sfera Politicii*, 81/2000, pp. 19-20.

[30] Antonescu presented himself as a Savior of Romania from the corrupt regime of Carol II in 1940, Iron Guard's terrorist violence, and as an anti-Soviet hero and re-unifier of Greater Romania in 1941. See Sorin Alexandrescu, Paradoxul Român [The Romania Paradox], Bucharest, Univers, 1998, pp. 140-193.

[31] Lucian Boia, *Istorie şi mit în conştiinţa românească* [History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness] Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997, pp. 276-277.

[32] See Ioan Scurtu, *Monarhia în România* [The History of Romanian Monarchy], Bucharest, Danubius, 1991.

nonetheless it polarized the Romanian society, encouraged the extremists to promote their anti-democratic agenda, distorted memory, and so on.

This is not to say that president Iliescu, definitely an anti-fascist, and FSN, striving for power, are the initiators of Antonescu's cult. For them Antonescu did not necessarily represent a model. However, their "utilitarian" and cheap Machiavellian approach was to bring them close, and strengthen the relations with the emerging organized extremism, which they often underestimated and thought they could control. When they realized the mistake they have done it was already too late.[33] *România Mare*, *Europa*, and *Gazeta de Vest* were already popular publications. Soon, they were to accuse even Iliescu, who hesitated to officially rehabilitate Antonescu, of being manipulated by the Jews and the West.

Post-communist attempts to rehabilitate Antonescu and his regime, and impose his cult have a too long and unpleasant history. A history that includes official commemorations by the Romanian parliament (1991, 1997, 1999), statues and memorials raised in several cities all over Romania, documentary and artistic movies (*Oglinda*, directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu in 1994), as well as protests, both from within Romania and international (US Congress in 1991, US State Department in 1993, The Anti-Defamation League, US Senators Denise Deconcini in 1995, Alphonse D'Amato and Cristopher Smith in 1997). Some of the cultish initiatives belonged to war veterans associations (the statues raised in 1993 in Târgu Mureş Piatra Neamț, and in 1995 in Bacău). Others were local initiatives that often had the support of the authorities representing the government or other state institutions (the statues raised in Slobozia and Lugoj). Last but not least, the state sponsored, from public funds, National Television and Radio broadcasting; army high-rank officers (General Mircea Chelaru and several others military historians such as Colonel Alesandru Duțu), Romania's general attorney (Vasile Manea Drăgulin in 1993, and Sorin Moisescu in 1996-1997), and several central dailies (*Adevărul*, *Jurnalul Național*) took part in the effort. From this perspective it seems that the extremists were only the most radical and most stubborn, nonetheless extremely and constantly noisy and visible but not unique, and definitely not alone.

Paradoxically, at the same time the Romanian government promised several times to ban extremist political parties and publications, hate-speech, anti-Semitism, Antonescu's cult, and the denial of Holocaust. Romania's presidents, Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu, took similar stands on the occasion of the commemoration of the pogrom in Iaşi, at the inauguration of, or while visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington. However, they were to remain un-successful in their endeavors. No official, public, and explicit denunciation of Antonescu and past genocide has been recorded before 2001. A

[33] For the 1992 pro-governmental, anti-monarchic and pro-Antonescu, irresponsible media campaign see Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea Politicului. Europa de Est de la Stalin la Havel* [Reinventing Politics. Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel], Iaşi, Polirom, 1998, p. 217.

lack of political and prosecutorial will, backed by a permanent, often unjustified, fear of a possible loose of popularity might explain such stands. Unfortunately, few took into consideration the costs for the twelve years of political stuttering, unfulfilled promises, and defiances.

Though not the only and most probably not the most urgent problem Romania had to solve in the long preparatory process of integration in NATO and the European Union, the issue of Antonescu's cult had a significant negative impact on Romania's international image, and credibility. The West did not want to accept Romania's entrance in its political and military structures with "Antonescu on the flag." For them, any attempt to rehabilitate Antonescu, and the denial of Holocaust, were but symptom of a weak democratic society. Nonetheless, the more obstinate the Romanians were in their reluctance to solve this legal and moral problem, the more pessimistic the westerners with regard Romania's chances to become a viable partner.

Ordinary Romanians might have not understood the incompatibility between NATO and EU on one hand and Antonescu and the dictatorial past he personifies on the other hand. Not the same think is to be said about the politicians who, due to the permanent Western pressure, particularly in connection with NATO and EU entry requirements, gradually "abandoned" him. Meaning that, at least, they changed their discourse about the Marshal.[34]

Many things changed radically in Romanian politics after 1996, and the 2000 elections, at least at the surface. One could only with difficulties recognize in Ion Iliescu the neo-communist politician from the early 1990s. His amiable attitude toward Mihai I, and firm disagreement with Vadim Tudor, the extremist "ally" from 1992-1994, are illustrative in this sense. Did the president, and the Social Democrat Party, finally understood the message of the West? Did he realized after the 2000 elections, when Vadim Tudor managed to come on the second position, and his party took 21% of the votes, the real danger represented by political extremism? Most probably yes, as long as he kept the promises he made to the West, and the Romanians, who credited him with a comfortable majority of votes just to eliminate the peril and shame named "Greater Romania Party."

In October 2001, during his official visit in USA, after several meetings with members of the US Congress, and representatives of the Jewish community, the Romanian Prime Minister, Adrian Năstase, promised that the Romanian government would ban Holocaust denial, and the cult of war criminals. Five months later, in March 2002, during a seminar organized by the Holocaust Museum together with the Romanian Ministry of Defense, several Romanian officials publicly reaffirmed the responsibility of Antonescu's

[34] Michael Shafir, "Memory, Memorials, and Membership: Romania's NATO quest and Marshal Antonescu", *RFE/RL East European Perspectives*, 5, 3, 5 February 2003, p. 4.

government, and of the Romanian army, for participating in the Holocaust. On the same occasion they stated the intention of the government to prohibit, by legal means, in the future, any organization, publication, and symbol of a fascist, racist and xenophobe type, and prosecute the denial of Holocaust in public. At stake was Romania's entrance in normality once the state institutions will say a "farewell" to anti-democratic ideologies and symbols. Not fortuitous, the Ministry of Defense was the first institution to take this step. The army wanted to demonstrate once more that it made its "home work," and prepared for the 2002 Prague Summit. And that the officers, the army elite, will no longer deny past responsibility, and never play a role in the rehabilitation of Antonescu, as they often did after 1989.

Soon after, the government elaborated a low stipulating the removal of statues and other monuments raised in honor of war criminals and individuals responsible for crimes against peace and humanity.[35] Streets, public squares, and parks could not be named after such persons. Moreover, fascist and racist organizations, publications, and symbols were forbidden. The cult of fascist leaders was also proscribed. Past trials and sentences against persons condemned by an international court for war crimes and crimes against humanity could not be contested, rejected, and denied. Likewise, specific penalties were included this time. Very general but not ambiguous, the low was meant to eliminate confusion and underline Bucharest's new political attitude toward Antonescu and his cult. However, no specific references to his person were made.

The new low was not welcomed by all, generated debates, and bitter responses. The liberals proposed a similar low in the case of communism, and considered that fascism and communism have to be condemned altogether. Other members of the parliament, even SDP senators, opposed it. For example Adrian Păunescu protested against those who described the Marshall as a war criminal, requested a new trial, denied Antonescu's anti-Semitic policy and Romania's responsibility for the Holocaust. "No government can establish what only experts are entitled to do… and… historic matters are the competence of historians."[36] Naturally, Greater Romania Party and its leader had, again, the sourest reaction. Vadim Tudor said, "the law is irresponsible and stupid," and called Prime Minister Năstase "a communist apparatchik, lacking historical culture and patriotic feelings." The rest was to come: "someone is interested in portraying the Romanians as a nation of criminals …they want to kill Marshall Ion Antonescu once more." On 31st of May members of the "Greater Romania Party," together with the "Pro-Antonescu League," celebrated 120 years from the dictator's birth, and 56 years from his execution. They even un-covered the bust of Antonescu in front of "Sfinții Împărați Constantin şi Elena" church in

[35] See *Monitorul Oficial*, 214, 28 March 2002.

[36] http://www.divers.ro/Doru Dragomir, "Romanian MP's Reject Holocaust Responsibility", DIVERS, 2 / April 08, 2002.

Bucharest.[37] In Cluj, Mayor Gheorghe Funar, vice-president of the "Greater Romania Party," who fanatically admires Antonescu for his anti-Hungarian stands, declared that he will continue to honor the dictator, preserve the name of the boulevard "Ion Antonescu," and even raise a huge statue in his memory. Finally, media took part in the debate. Some saluted the initiative; others considered it exaggerated, and a result of international pressure. Not few, described it as a result of the new political pragmatism of the government, but remained largely skeptical toward the determination of the authorities to enforce the law, and the sudden, overnight "democratization" of the Romanian political class.[38] And, to a certain extend, they proved right. Things did not go smoothly at all. The Prime Minister had to justify the decision to his subordinates. In some cases, mayors refused to remove Antonescu's statues, and change the name of streets. However this was not the main problem as long as in many cases the prefects, sometimes backed by the police finally imposed the will of the government.[39] What was of a real concern was that though many consider the law as necessary, and agree that fascist symbols have to be removed, and anti-Semitism banned, they also believed that Antonescu was a patriot. Meanwhile, synagogues were devastated in Vatra Dornei and Fălticeni, swastika was drawn on the walls of the Jewish theatre in Bucharest, several extremist publications continued to mushroom.[40]

Romanians have problems with history. They do not know it. At the same time they also have problems with memory. Theirs is extremely selective, and distorted. A combination of the two makes many accept the icon of Antonescu as a liberator of Romanian territories, a patriot, a shield against Germany, and a sword against Soviet Union. They do not realize the negative impact of Antonescu's rule on Romania, and their own lives. At the same time they do not want to remember his anti-Semitic policy, and do not want to accept, and debate the Romanian Holocaust. If they do, the main concern is to look for circumstantial evidences, aimed to help them contextualize "the deeds" of the Marshall, to explain, and sometimes even justify them. The final result was, sometimes still is, but a tendentious transformation of Antonescu into a symbol

[37] A week later the bust was covered. The extremists thus hoped that the authorities will not demolish it.

[38] Andrei Cornea, "Sfânta imagine" [The Sacred Image], *Revista 22*, 629 (13), 26 March. – 1 April. 2002. Months later, the Juridical Commission of the Romanian Senate, after fierce debates on the writ, defined the Holocaust restrictively in terms of "Systematical mass extermination of European Jewry, in nazist extermination camps, during the Second World War". Not even one reference to Romania and Antonescu was included.

[39] In Cluj, Funar was arrested for opposing the decision to remove the portrait of Antonescu and the machetes of Antonescu's statues from the city hall. In Iaşi the prefect opposed the initiative to raise a monument of Antonescu inside the garrison of a military unit.

[40] However, after 2000, and especially after 2002 Vadim Tudor, the most vociferous extremist, gradually ceased to appear on TV, and speak at the radio.

of national dignity, "a dictator much less evil than Hitler," even "a savior of the Romanian Jewry." Some forgot, others obliterate the fact that Antonescu transformed a political and military conflict into an ethnic struggle, accepted to play the role of a supreme arbiter, shaped the fate of the Jews by his own will, and, one way or the other, helped Hitler make Europe *Judenfrei*.[41]

Romanians do not have the memory of the Holocaust. They never had it, and were never encouraged to keep it.[42] They do not have even the memory of the war. Trauma, the main trigger of memory, is missing in their case, as the Romanians did not suffer like, for example, the Poles did. The elders do not remember anything except the tragic episode from 1940, the heroic one from 1941, two or three bombardments, the shortage of food, the death of the beloved, mainly soldiers, not civilians. Some remember 23rd of August 1944 but they generally link the event to the memory of communism, and often prefer not to recall it. The post-war generations remember even less. As their elders were forced to "remain silent," the youngsters' only connection with the past consists in the extremely ritualized, official, and ideologically bound triumphalist histories, movies, and museums. All they have is an "ersatz of memory,"[43] fictions and artifacts describing the anti-fascist military campaign of the Romanian army after 1944. Thus, when it comes to collective memory, a politically and socially sanctioned, official, massacred, extremely severed and mythologized version of the past represents the only legacy of the communist period. Moreover, after 1989, the total demise of the state as the "main choreographer" of memory was somewhat to worse things. When it comes to history and historical knowledge the situation is very much the same.

On the 28th of June 2002, the Romanian Academy, together with the Ministry of Culture, organized a special session on the issue of Holocaust in Romania. In the opening, Eugen Simion, the president of the academy, underlined the necessity of "assuming the past… as to …avoid tragedies in the future." Răzvan Teodorescu, the minister of culture, focused on the exigency to implement Low 31/2002, and the

[41] Romanians are not unique in this sense. The Austrians presented themselves as the first victims of the Nazis. The French had problems with the issue of collaborationism and insisted a lot on the mythology of the French resistance. Last but not least, the Dutch wrapped themselves around Anne Frank's diary as to present themselves as a heroic anti-nazi nation. Yet, none was that un-inspired as to defend their criminals and transform them into heroes. On contrary, they transformed them into scapegoats. And, at least for the moment, this strategy worked out.

[42] Few wanted to remember the Holocaust even in the democratic West after the war. Not only the perpetrators and executioners, but also the victims, the survivors, were stroked by amnesia in the early days. Many accepted it as a lesson of history only in time, when they understood that only memory can stop the removal from history of those eliminated from the face of the earth. Before the 1970s, the beginning of the era of witness, one can hardly speak about the emergence of collective memory. See Annette Wieviorka, "The Holocaust Memory", in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twenties Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 129-140.

[43] See Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory. The Construction of French Past. Conflicts and Division*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 1-6.

"necessity of memory refreshness with every generation." However, the academy effort and strive for consensus led nowhere. Only with difficulties historians gathered at the session came to conclude that Romania took part in the Holocaust, at the same time underlining the fact that there was no Holocaust in Romania, and finally characterized Antonescu as a "tragic figure". Some of the historians did nothing else but to abandon their previous pro-Antonescu attitude while insisting on themes and mythologies that no longer makes the interest of scholars in western academia.[44] Nevertheless, what was not clear was the final purpose of the session. Did the academy wanted to back the political effort of the government? Was a new, unique, and acceptable truth about the past, and a comprehensive definition of the Holocaust, what the historians were trying to forge? If so, than one might say that they were from the very beginning to fail.

Hard to state in few words what Romanian historians have to say on this extremely sensitive topic.[45] Some, like Gheorghe Buzatu, who consider that politicians should not interfere, and claim that the low represents "a second execution of Antonescu," are ultranationalists. Others, like Dinu C. Giurescu, who considers that Antonescu was "the man of his country and not the third man of the Axis," are conservative.[46] In some cases the pre-1989 intellectual and political pedigree of the historian, in other cases his present institutional and political affiliation, might explain why some accepted to play the role of Antonescu's "memorians." In other cases it might not, as many historians ended trapped by the pro-Antonescu manipulation propaganda though they tried to stay away.

Over the past decade and a half many Romanian historians were perceived, in block, as apologists of Antonescu, nationalists, revisionists, even negationists. Some of them were. Others were not. Not few have tried after 1989 to rehabilitate the dictator, though not all transformed this rehabilitation in a personal, or party, political task. What might have left this impression is the fact that many operated, sometimes as professionals, sometimes as opinion makers, with long term grounded mythologies when they described Antonescu as an honest man, a patriot, an anti-communist champion, and a savior of his country. Nonetheless, many tended to

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[44] Ioan Scurtu de-mantled the anti-Semitic myth of "Judeo-bolshevism." Florin Constantiniu focused on two specific moments June 1941, and November 1943, accepted the idea of ethnic-cleansing as part of Antonescu policy in the East but only to the extend this position could help in cleaning the image of the marshal as a war criminal.

[45] Many are complaining today that, after 1989, historians were not allowed to objectively investigate the Antonescu period. The resurgence of nationalism, and the «politically correct» attitude of the west, are responsible for restraining the progress of historical research. See Florin Constantiniu, "22 iunie 1941. Intrarea României în război. Zece întrebări şi răspunsuri" [22 of June 1941. Romania's entrance in war. Ten questions and ten answers], *Adevărul literar şi artistic*, 527/19 iunie 1999.

[46] Giurescu was the first Romanian historian who, in 1991, publicly stated Antonescu's responsibility for war crimes, deportation, anti-Semitism. Andrei Pippidi, another Romanian prominent historian who did the same thing was to become one of the favorite targets of the extremist "Romania Mare" review.

retrieve the positive side of the Marshall, even when they did not deny the genocide, the deportations, his political and military huge errors, with tragic consequences for Romania, and even when they expressly underlined that Antonescu, an anti-liberal and an anti-democrat, can not represent a political model for 2001 Romania.[47]

Historians are by definition less heretical than others. They always believe that they represent an authority and keep a pivotal position, and that their professional duty is to provide knowledge, and not to recall the past. Concerned with their academic prestige, many prefer a peculiar precocious stand when they have to come to terms with historically sensitive issues. Sometimes they succeed in their efforts. Sometimes they do not. However, their disagreement with the others is not always and not necessarily politically and ideologically grounded. It can be methodological, and terminological, as well. Non-Popperians less interested in present day practical issues and the decisions society has to face, they prefer to limit their "Plea" to historicization, even when the subject is existentially involved in the nexus between past and future. The present immediacy of the past bothers them, especially when it involves forms of moral condemnation. What they fear for most is that the latest might act as a blockade to knowledge. Not rarely that is to explain why historians do not want to accept and operate with memory, and prefer more vigorous, classic categories such as power, ideology, and state interest.[48]

After 1989, in the absence of *ancillae ideologiae*, pressed by the public opinion – *Where are the historians?,* many Romanian historians started to recover and re-evaluate the pre-communist past. Struggling over it, obsessed with the idea of truth and objectivity, guided by methodological rationality, they disregarded the present and future implication of their treatment and representation of the past. What they refused to admit was a political and didactic approach, the ties between the past and the post-1989 democratization process, the way Romanian society was to (re) define citizenship, national identity, and so on. Problems only begin when the others protested, and remembered them about the pogroms, "death trains," deportations, and the concentration camps in Transnistria. "Let the Past pass away!" some of the historians than shout. Others invoked a "grace of a latest birth." Not few denied, or restricted as much as possible the responsibility of Antonescu, his regime, of the Romanian army, and Romanian civil population for the genocide. Nonetheless they tried to limit as much as possible the number of victims.[49] Unprepared to relinquish all the internal resistance they felt against the full magnitude of the nameless atrocities committed by Antonescu's regime and the Romanian army, historians prefered to approach, explain in context, and

[47] See Adrian Cioroianu, "Antonescu – drama şi bustul" [Antonescu-his drama and his bust], *Dilema*, 432-433, June, 2001.

[48] See Jörn Rüssen, "The Logic of Historicization. Metahistorical Reflections on the Debate between Riedländer and Broszat", *History and Memory*, 9, 5, 1&2, fall 1997.

[49] An exclusive focus on this issue is in itself indicative for a decadent appetite for the lurid, and not a necessary quest for the truth.

define the genocide as part of the war, a tragic episode, an error.[50] Tragically, they did not realized that this way they only came to cross the conventional limits of representation of the "unthinkable" and "unspeakable," push toward trivialization, and often end by accepting the "Iron Times, Iron Brooms"[51] logic and terminology of the perpetrators, justify and excuse their deeds.

Historians might continue to consider Antonescu as "a savior of the Jews" and stress that what is "essential is that by the end of the war Romanian Jews were still alive."[52] They might continue to quote Fildermann, insist that Romanians refused to handle the Jews to Hitler's henchmen, that they did not took part in the implementation of the Final Solution, on contrary helped the Jews fled to Palestine. They might also continue to look for individual responsibility, refuse symbolic collective guilt, reject global, conventional terminology, and prefer a more neutral one: ethnic cleansing, deportation, and pogrom.[53] What is sad is that all above are indicative for the, generally speaking, incapacity of the Romanian historians to morn, at least historically.

In March 2004 Romania joined NATO. In 2007, it joined the European Union. Thus, politics continued to play a significant role in eliminating the "phantom menace," and people's nostalgia for the heroic, mythologized history.[54] May be, in time, this will help the society to come to terms with the "Ugly Past." The next generations, released of frustrations, and in the absence of the sentiment of being "excluded," will be less selective in their memory, and understand what their elders refused to accept. That memory is not only about "than" but also about "now" and "here."[55] Dominick LaCapra "The quest for a positive identity or for normalization through denial provides only illusory meaning and does not further the emergence of an acceptable future. A reckoning with the past in keeping with democratic values require the ability – or at least the attempt – to read scars and to affirm only what deserves affirmation as one turns the lamp of critical reflection on oneself and one's own".

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[50] See Alex M. Stoenescu, *Istoria loviturilor de stat în România. Cele trei dictaturi* [The History of the Coup d'Etat in Romania. The Three Dictatorships], 3, Bucharest, RAO, 2002, p. 456.

[51] Michael Burleich, *The Third Reich. A New History*, London, Pan Books, 2000, especially chapter 8 "Iron Times, Iron Brooms: Racial War against the Jews".

[52] Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în al Doilea Război Mondial*, p. 146.

[53] Often, variations in terminology betray basic assumptions about the nature and place in history and memory of the genocide, up to its denial. See Isabel Wollaston, *A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance*, London, SPCK, 1996, pp. 1-3.

[54] Recently, on 22 October, 2003 Romania's President Ion Iliescu established an International Historical Commission of Enquiry into the murder of Romania's Jews. The findings of the Commission will be disseminated by all means, publishing a report, holding conferences, forming discussion groups, and so on. Teachers training programs and special curricular materials also make the interest of the Commission.

[55] Michael Shafir, "Memory, Memorials, and Membership: Romania's NATO quest and Marshal Antonescu", p. 1.